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ARTICLES

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Richard FitzRalph on Mind: Reconciling Augustine and Aristotle*

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Abstract

This article examines Richard FitzRalph's treatment of the human mind in his *Lectura on the Sentences*, focusing on his treatment of Augustinian and Aristotelian conceptions of cognition and volition. By situating FitzRalph within the broader scholastic debates of the early fourteenth century, with Neo-Augustinianism in particular, it argues that his analysis represents both a careful exegesis of Augustine's *De Trinitate* and an engagement with the Aristotelian hylomorphic framework. The study highlights FitzRalph's nuanced approach to the distinctness of memory, intellect, and will, his treatment of species in memory, and his effort to secure a middle path between identity and distinction theories of the soul's powers.

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1. Introduction

In an article entitled “Richard FitzRalph on Whether Cognition and Volition Are Really the Same: Solving an Augustinian Puzzle,” Severin Kitanov comments as follows:

As can be seen from a closer examination of FitzRalph’s early work, his *Lectura on the Sentences* of Peter Lombard, FitzRalph is a very conscientious reader of Augustine. FitzRalph frequently cites the text of major Augustinian works at length, and he demonstrates sensitivity to subtle nuances of meaning in Augustine’s writing. FitzRalph’s solution to the problem of identity and difference between cognition and volition is the outcome of a careful exegesis of Augustine’s *De Trinitate*, and it represents at the same time an attempt to secure a *via media* in the early 14th century scholastic debate regarding the ontological status of the faculties or powers of the human soul, a position that acknowledges the multidimensionality and diversity of the soul’s operations concurrently affirming the substantial unity and integrity of the soul.¹

FitzRalph (1299–1360) belongs to the Neo-Augustinian revival at Oxford, a varied and internally contested movement whose participants both influenced and disagreed with each other. Through his patron, Bishop John de Grandisson of Exeter (1292–1369), he forms part of an intellectual tradition extending through Richard Bury (1287–1345) to the *De causa Dei* of Thomas Bradwardine (1300–1349), while also influencing continental authors such as Gregory of Rimini (1300–1358). FitzRalph’s Neo-Augustinianism has been examined by a number of authors² and is now seen, contrary to earlier opinion, not as evidence of a backward-looking conservatism but of a dynamic engagement with contemporary debates. In FitzRalph’s case these centered on the topic of God’s foreknowledge, human freedom, prophecy, and future contingents.³ In turning to a close reading of the text of Augustine itself, the renewal of “Augustinian” thought sought by thinkers such as FitzRalph was to address problems which were beginning to trouble their contemporaries and in the context of the Oxford of FitzRalph’s time this

¹ Kitanov, 2017, p. 81.

² See, Kitanov, 2017, Dunne & Nolan, 2023a, Dunne & Nolan, 2023b.

³ See, Slotemaker, 2017; Kitanov, 2017; Nolan, 2017; Dunne, 2023a, 2023b.

meant also engaging with the alternative system of Aristotle and his Commentator on knowing and willing. FitzRalph does this through a detailed analysis of Augustine's teaching on intellect, memory and will in the *De Trinitate*.⁴ This did not mean a rejection of the Aristotelian approach, but, as we shall see, an attempt at a reconciliation between the two insofar as this was possible.

As Eric Saak has noted in a number of works, there are many difficulties in employing the term Augustinian and Augustinianism in a precise and accepted sense apart from, for example, the Order of Augustinian Hermits (OESA).⁵ Saak has also deeply engaged with the positions of earlier scholars such as Trapp and Oberman and the notion of a *via Gregorii* leading from a fourteenth-century Augustinianism (*schola Augustiniana moderna*) down to Martin Luther and the corresponding attempt to trace back from some of Luther's concerns into the thought of the later Middle Ages.⁶ Closer scrutiny does not completely undermine this narrative, but it does require significant analysis and contextualization of a very complex reception history.

⁴ As Slotemaker (2017) points out, the concentration in the historiography on those themes such as grace and redemption which come to the fore at the time of the Reformation, especially with regard to Martin Luther, has meant a neglect of other themes in medieval Augustinianism, especially regarding philosophical theology as discussed in the Sentences Commentaries of the time. He comments (2017, p. 19) that "[...] despite the fact that Augustine's *De Trinitate* was one of the most important theological sources for late medieval scholastics, there is almost no literature on the reception of Augustine's *De Trinitate* [...]."

⁵ Saak, 2012, p. 224: "We must come to the realization that to understand 'late medieval Augustinianism' historically, the only legitimate historical referent is the historical noun that was the social and psychic systems of the late medieval Augustinian Hermits who uniquely identified themselves with their created image of Augustine. This historical Augustinianism distinguished itself from all previous medieval appropriations of Augustine. Philosophical or theological definitions of the term 'Augustinian' or 'Augustinianism' cannot provide the historical foundation for the designation of the label, even if they can provide a philosophical or theological definition. Moreover, modern or contemporary interpretations of the 'historical Augustine' cannot provide the basis for the historical interpretation of Augustine or Augustinianism. A genuinely historical Augustinianism can only be based on the historical interpretation and understanding of what it meant to be an 'Augustinian', which in the later Middle Ages was inseparable from membership in the OESA and those who followed Augustine's religion."

⁶ Saak, 2017, pp. 3–10, 14. See also Saak, 2013, pp. 63–66.

I do not attempt to resolve these issues here, but simply to contribute to a fuller understanding of developments at Oxford in the 1330s, a decade that deserves closer attention as the setting for one of the Neo-Augustinian revival's most important works, Thomas Bradwardine's *De causa Dei*. FitzRalph is also sometimes included among these new Pelagians as a semi-Pelagian.⁷

The term "Augustinian" then seems to be problematic as it has been used loosely by scholars to indicate a number of positions, ideas, stances as well as organizations and institutions. I think that, *pace* Saak, this is a situation which is likely to continue. Already over four decades ago, William Courtenay commented: "Augustinianism may be, like nominalism, one of the most ill-defined and confusing of labels."⁸ Trying to give a precise outline of what "Augustinianism" was seems doomed to failure and using it as a label to describe the later medieval reception of Augustine's works seems ill-advised. For example, scholars have spoken of "Franciscan Augustinianism" associated with Bonaventure and then the "Second Augustinian School" associated with Henry of Ghent, John Duns Scotus, and later Scotists.⁹ These neat distinctions break down if one looks at the thought of Thomas Aquinas, whose use of Neoplatonic sources has already been explored and established,¹⁰ and who, in so many ways, is a faithful follower of Augustine.¹¹

Courtenay comments that the Augustinianism of the fourteenth century, influenced by a more intense reading of Augustine, is usually divided into two phases: an initial shift observed in Giles of Rome toward an affective theology, with an emphasis on God as will and love, the primacy of grace, and the divine initiative in salvation. One idea from this first stage that proved especially important for FitzRalph was dominion, the lordship of grace, that only someone in a state of grace had the right to exercise authority over persons and property.¹² Courtenay then mentions the second stage, considered the most important, beginning with Bradwardine at Oxford and then Gregory of Rimini and Hugolino of Orvieto.

⁷ See, for example, Schabel, 2023, p. 232.

⁸ Courtenay, 1980, p. 58.

⁹ Courtenay, 1980, p. 59, referring to distinctions made by Gilson.

¹⁰ See, for example, Hankey, 2011.

¹¹ The point is well made by Schumacher, 2011, pp. 154–180.

¹² Courtenay, 1980, p. 59.

The “movement,” if we may call it that, is characterized by a source-critical approach to the writings of Augustine which involves longer, accurate quotations with precise references,¹³ something which we also see in FitzRalph.¹⁴ There seems to be a shift towards themes from the later Augustine which touch on grace and predestination, to which is linked the question of the contingency of the future. FitzRalph’s role was not to initiate an original movement but, through the development of new arguments and methodologies (close to those of the Oxford Calculators), to strengthen an existing trend. As a result, questions such as future contingents became the dominant focus at Oxford for more than a decade after his *Lectura on the Sentences* (1328–1329).

Courtenay suggested the adoption of the term Neo-Augustinianism (which I have done here) to indicate a body of ideas that “derive from but need not be faithful to St. Augustine,”¹⁵ or, indeed, I might add, could even “go beyond Augustine.” As Genest comments in discussing FitzRalph’s treatment of God as a possible deceiver: the God of Richard FitzRalph is no longer the God of Augustine.¹⁶ Courtenay also makes the important point that the emergence of Neo-Augustinianism at Oxford differed from Paris in that at Oxford it did not originate from members of the Augustinian Order. Although originally only a suspicion, Courtenay’s intuition that the second stage of Neo-Augustinianism at Oxford began before 1344¹⁷—the date of appearance of Bradwardine’s *De causa Dei* and roughly the date of the *Lectura* of Gregory of Rimini at Paris—is certainly being confirmed as editions of earlier writers become available. And among “the several factors” which come together in the decade before Bradwardine, that of FitzRalph must now also be taken into account.

¹³ Courtenay, 1980, p. 59.

¹⁴ This seemed to be a tendency down to the time of Luther. As Saak (2017, p. 91) writes: “Thus, Luther exhibited a source erudition with respect to Augustine’s works, at least to some extent, of a kind that Damasus Trapp noted among the OESA’s late medieval new Augustinian school (*schola Augustiniana moderna*), filling in imprecise references in Lombard with specific citations.”

¹⁵ Courtenay, 1980, p. 61.

¹⁶ Genest, 2023, p. 280: “The God of FitzRalph, who does not deceive but who *could* deceive, and could do so because he does not come under the normal moral law, is not at all the God of Augustine.”

¹⁷ Courtenay, 1980, p. 65.

An earlier contention that FitzRalph's "Neo-Augustinianism" was essentially that of Henry of Ghent and Anselm and somehow a conservative approach that did not engage with contemporary innovations is not now a position which can be maintained. Such a position would commit much the same error as describing Aquinas as essentially Aristotelian to the exclusion of all else. FitzRalph's Neo-Augustinian reception of Augustine is highly context-dependent (something we are only beginning to appreciate) and it is directed towards specific goals and contemporary problems, particularly the revelation of future contingents.

If the more general problem of the reception of Augustine's writings in the later Middle Ages remains difficult, the same can be said of the reception of the *De Trinitate*, which will largely concern us in what follows. Indeed, as Kany states with regard to Latin pre-modern reception of this work, a "reliable account of the reception of the *De Trinitate* is not yet available."¹⁸ This is certainly true, and *a fortiori*, of Oxford in the 1330s. My aim is not to provide a comprehensive account of that history but merely to identify an important point of departure in the Oxford of the 1330s, where FitzRalph's use of Augustine's *De Trinitate*, together with Aristotle and Henry of Ghent, reveals the distinctive contribution he made.

It is in Book I, questions 6–9, of Richard FitzRalph's *Lectura on the Sentences* (1328–1329, revised 1330–1331) where this confrontation and attempted reconciliation of the two systems is presented. The questions and articles which follow show an unmistakable debt to Augustine and his *De Trinitate*:

Question 6 Whether the human mind is an image of the uncreated Trinity.

Art. 1 Whether memory, intelligence and will can be really distinguished from each other.

Art. 2 Whether there is some cognitive habitus in a rational spirit.

Art. 3 Whether actual cognition can be really distinguished from the species in memory.

Art. 4 Whether cognition and volition are really the same.

Art. 5 Whether the parts of the created image are equal.

Art. 6 Reply to the principal question.

Question 7 Whether the mind itself and certain habitus present to it are principles in the memory with respect to it.

¹⁸ Kany, 2013, p. 389 and note 4 above.

Question 8 Whether from the presence of a species in memory actual cognition follows necessarily by means of it.

Question 9 Whether the agent intellect is part of the image.¹⁹

The latter questions are in fact articles or unfinished pieces, which were not incorporated into a single question (namely question 6, as we might expect), during FitzRalph's revision of his *opus correctum*. Further study is needed on this phenomenon—I recently addressed this with regard to Book I, question 11: Whether contradictory desires or affections can be in the same will at the same time, and which is part of the *appetitus contrarii* debate. This is an unfinished and not determined question which nonetheless is of interest especially since part of the argument makes its way into question 10.²⁰

¹⁹ Quaestio 6 *Utrum mens humana sit ymago trinitatis increate.*

Art. 1 *Utrum memoria, intelligentia et voluntas distinguantur ab invicem realiter.*

Art. 2 *Utrum in spiritu rationali sit aliquis habitus cognitivus.*

Art. 3 *Utrum actualis cogitatio distinguatur realiter a specie in memoria.*

Art. 4 *Utrum cognitio et volitio sint idem realiter.*

Art. 5 *Utrum partes ymagineis create sint equales.*

Art. 6 *Ad questionem principalem.*

Quaestio 7 *Utrum mens ipsa et ceteri habitus sibi presentes sint principia in memoria respectu sui.*

Quaestio 8 *Utrum ex presentia speciei in memoria sequatur necessario cogitatio actualis per illam.*

Quaestio 9 *Utrum intellectus agens sit aliqua pars ymagineis.*

²⁰ See Dunne, 2024. It remains an open question as to the function or role of such floating articles. Were they notes for the actual debates? Or handy lists of arguments with potential solutions? Indeed, FitzRalph was well known for increasing the stock of standard arguments and the detail of questions, e.g., his question on future contingents expands greatly on, say, Ockham's treatment of the topic. No doubt future studies will shed light on the matter but for the moment I would simply indicate that as far as the content is concerned, that these "questions" 7–9 do seem to depart from the close reading of and connection with the *De Trinitate* in question 6 and seem to address more technical issues, such as the understanding of the agent intellect in Aristotle and Averroes, on the one hand, and Henry of Ghent on the other (question 9). Again, and not to be solved at this point, the puzzle still remains as to the question concerning the preservation of a different arrangement of the text in manuscript Oriel College, 15, containing material not found anywhere else but which seem to be stylistically different from the rest of the text. Again, the version of question 7, as transmitted in Oriel College,

2. The Powers of the Soul Debates

These texts from FitzRalph's *Lectura*, I, questions 6–9, can be seen as part of the debates concerning the powers of the soul. A recent book of translations by Russell Friedman and Can Laurens Löwe²¹ has highlighted this, taking us from Bonaventure (1221–1274), through Albert the Great (1200–1280) and Thomas Aquinas (1224–1274) up to John Duns Scotus (1265–1308) and William Ockham (1287–1347) and so to within a decade or so of FitzRalph's treatment of the topics. The question of the soul and its powers normally came up in the course of commentaries on the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard (Book I, distinction 3; Book II, distinction 16), itself drawing upon Augustine's *De Trinitate*. As mentioned above, FitzRalph is part of an Augustinian revival and thus it is no surprise that this topic, the human mind as an image of the Trinity, will be suffused with a critical reconstruction of Augustine's authority from the texts themselves. In general, when discussing the human mind as an image of the Trinity writers concentrated on the triadic structure of the human mind as composed of intellect, memory, and will. A related problem is that if the three divine persons are really distinct, would that not suggest that intellect memory and will are also really distinct? Indeed, this is precisely the question FitzRalph poses in the first article: are memory, understanding, and will really distinct from one another? And, by a further twist, are they also distinct from the mind itself? In the very first argument, Aristotle and Averroes are introduced on the role of the intellect as the place where the species are preserved, thereby arguing for the identity and not distinctness between intellect and memory. The topic of the role of the species in memory seemed to be of particular focus in the debates of 1328–1329 and at Oxford in the years directly following.²²

It is not immediately apparent that something rather curious underlies these debates. On the one hand, there is a centuries old tradition, certainly going back to Augustine, of a very religious personal and spiritual

15 as question 9, gives a very different structure from that which is found in the other manuscripts and gives the replies to arguments also not found elsewhere but which seem to be authentic.

²¹ Friedman & Löwe, 2025.

²² See Dunne, 2023a, pp. 77–82.

conception of understanding and memory, one which lends itself to a theological understanding of an innate desire for truth, beauty, and goodness as leading to our ultimate rest in God as truth, goodness, and beauty itself. Aristotle is thought of as different: naturalistic, scientific, and rather secular. Given their differing points of departure, mapping one theory of mind on to the other is certainly going to be a challenge. Yet FitzRalph, like many before and after him, seems to take it for granted that the two traditions can be reconciled and that Aristotle (384–322 BC) and Averroes (1126–1198) can be read consistently with Augustine (354–430) and Henry of Ghent (1217–1293). As we shall see below, this is particularly evident in FitzRalph's treatment of the role of the agent intellect.

In his introduction to the medieval debates on the relation between the soul and its powers, Löwe²³ points out that, on the medieval Christian Aristotelian account there is a close link between the substantial form of the human being, its soul, and its powers. But what is the nature of this connection? Does the essence of the soul correspond to its powers or to its vital operations (*potentiae animae*)? Löwe distinguishes between *identity theory*, according to which the soul is simply its powers, and *distinction theory*, according to which the soul is distinct from its powers. Ockham, for example, is taken as a defender of strong identity theory, i.e., any given part of the soul is identical to the soul. Löwe illustrates this with the example of Socrates: his power of thought is identical with his soul and so too is his will. The same applies to every power of the soul, which are thereby identical with one another.²⁴ Thus, thinking is identical with willing, and together they constitute a single power of the soul.

For Löwe, Aquinas represents a version of distinction theory, that the powers of the soul are qualities distinct from the essence of the soul. Another version of distinction theory was defended by Duns Scotus, namely, the powers of the soul are distinct from the essence of the soul through their *rationes formales*.

If we now turn to Augustine himself: by mind, Augustine understands the human soul according to its “optimal functioning.”²⁵ Unlike the Aristotelian approach he does not understand the human soul as being essentially

²³ Löwe, 2025, pp. 1–4.

²⁴ Löwe, 2025, p. 5.

²⁵ Löwe, 2025, p. 6; note 14.

the form of the body but sees it as an immaterial substance in its own right.²⁶ But like Aristotle, Augustine thinks that our soul accounts for life and is the center of all of our vital powers. The highest function of our soul is linked to the three most perfect powers, the rational, i.e., memory, understanding and will. These correspond to our power to store ideas, to think about them, and so to will something. These three powers are one mind, not three substances but one substance also reflecting Father, Son and Holy Spirit.²⁷ The image or comparison is quite clear, but not the metaphysical foundation:²⁸ it is not clear whether Augustine thinks that memory, understanding, and will are identical to the mind or distinct from it. Although Augustine appears to favor a strong identity theory, there are also passages that suggest a version of distinction theory.²⁹ The potential for confusion was therefore considerable. Medieval thinkers readily embraced Augustine's image theory, but they did not reach a unanimous conclusion about the relation between the mind and its powers:

There are, then, textual tensions in Augustine's account of the relation between the mind and its powers. It is hardly surprising that these tensions had a significant impact on how Augustine was read by Latin medieval thinkers, who wholeheartedly embraced his image doctrine. Given Augustine's different and incompatible-seeming remarks about the relation of the mind to its powers, there was no unanimity among his medieval commentators as to how his account of this relation ought to be understood.³⁰

With the arrival of Aristotle's writings and their general acceptance by the mid-thirteenth century, the exegesis of Augustine's text and triadic conception of mind is accompanied by broader considerations as to the nature of the soul itself and its powers as suggested by Aristotle's tripartite division of soul.

The development of the debate is reflected in FitzRalph's own treatment of it. His concern is not only whether the mind is identical with, or distinct from, the powers of memory, understanding, and will. He also asks

²⁶ Löwe, 2025, p. 7.

²⁷ See Augustine, *De Trinitate*, Book X, chapter 12 (ed. Mountain & Glorie, 1968, pp. 213–214), and Löwe, p. 6, note 13 for further sources in Augustine.

²⁸ See Löwe, 2025, p. 8.

²⁹ See Löwe, 2025, p. 9.

³⁰ See Löwe, 2025, p. 10.

the broader—more Aristotelian—question whether the human soul is identical with, or distinct from, all of its vital powers, including the rational, sensory and vegetative powers. Thinkers sought an answer within the Augustinian paradigm initially, but developments arose through recourse to Aristotle's *De anima* and the *Metaphysics*, and to the notions of form, potency, and act, and no longer focusing on the human soul only, but on different kinds of soul. This marks the shift to hylomorphism: the human soul, although of a special kind, is nevertheless a substantial form among many. Löwe calls this the “de-anthropocentrizing” of the debate post 1250.³¹ One of Richard FitzRalph's concerns is therefore to relate and reconcile the Augustinian and Aristotelian conceptions of mind, while also taking positions on Aquinas, Henry of Ghent, and Duns Scotus.

3. Species

Another topic that featured prominently in the debates over the powers of the soul was that of species, particularly after Ockham's rejection of species theory as most thinkers sought to defend and reinforce it.³² FitzRalph accepted the existence of both intelligible and sensible species and seems to assume the entire process of the multiplication of species. The objects generate species which are impressed on the senses before the senses act; an impressed species is the means by which the soul knows an object through a likeness or similitude. In a very personal statement, FitzRalph refers to someone he had once heard who vigorously argued against the existence of species. It may be that FitzRalph actually heard Ockham himself since he was old enough to have heard the Venerable Inceptor teach at Oxford, but, if not Ockham himself, then one of his close followers, since on this point—the rejection of species—Ockham was almost universally opposed. FitzRalph also confesses that he himself doubted the existence of species, thinking that everything was either a substance or a mixture of the elemental qualities, to which, rather intriguingly, he adds light but does not unfortunately develop this. He thinks that the denial of species comes from ordinary everyday experience where people rather uncritically adopt a crude realism, thinking

³¹ Löwe, 2025, p. 16.

³² See Tachau, 1988, pp. 236–242.

that “sight is seeing and hearing is hearing”³³ because they do not realize that what they see and hear is the reception of the visual and auditory species. Indeed, in one argument FitzRalph entertains—almost anticipating Bishop Berkeley—the possibility that God could directly impress species on our minds without the existence of anything “behind” them. Species remain necessary for knowledge, but their being caused by a physical reality does not.

FitzRalph also accepts the creation of intelligible species and their storage by memory (intellectual). Sensible and intellectual species are necessary for cognition, but these impressed species are not identical with the acts of sensation, cognition or intellection. The species on its own as received in the sense organ is not enough to account for sensation, the will or the appetite has to focus on the object for sensation to take place. He also accepts that as in the case of angelic knowledge, God could impress the species directly without the need for anything extramental through God’s absolute power. That said, FitzRalph is also concerned with rejecting the view that sensation is identical with the species and affirming that the act is a thing other than the species in the intellectual memory. He accepted the general outlines of Scotus’s theories and the critique of Henry of Ghent among others and seems to accept the existence of species as corporeal or physical entities.³⁴

In the *Lectura* I, question 6, article 3, the problem is raised regarding the relationship between actual cognition and the species in memory. As Löwe puts it, memory is our power to store “cognitive contents”, understanding our power concurrently to think about them and then our power to will something.³⁵ But is actual cognition of the species distinct from its preservation in memory?

³³ Richard FitzRalph, *Lectura in Sententias*, I, q. 6, art. 3 (*PI*, f. 147rb): “Puto dico quod isti si non sentirent species in oculis suis nec sonos participant in auribus omnino non crederent talia esse, set dicerent quod visus esset sua visio et auditus audicio et aer lucidus esset lumen sicut ego quemdam valentem aliquando audiui dicentem sic. Et dicunt aliqui quod omnis color est lux et omnis sapor est qualitates prime connixte et odor est sapor, immo ego aliquando non credebam aliquid esse nisi substantiam vel aliquam 5 qualitatuum primarum scilicet quattuor elementares et lucem.”

³⁴ As to how FitzRalph’s arguments impressed and influenced Adam Wodeham both on this topic and others, see Dunne, 2023a, pp. 89–91.

³⁵ Löwe, 2025, p. 7.

For FitzRalph, objects generate species which are impressed on the senses before the senses act; the senses are first active, then passive. Again, the understanding must first receive a species before it produces an actual cognition. FitzRalph's distinct contribution here seems to be a shift away from a focus on the *species in medio* to the *species in memoria*. He affirms the creation of intelligible species and their storage by the intellectual memory. Ultimately, FitzRalph regards his own position as close to that of Henry of Ghent. As he notes, Henry holds that actual knowledge is really distinct from the species preserved in the intellectual memory, because otherwise knowledge would not be an act of the intellect but would instead be caused directly by the species itself. FitzRalph continues, stating that it seems to him that actual knowledge can only take place if one takes the intellect to be its efficient cause.³⁶ Interestingly—and not uniquely in FitzRalph—in the *Lectura* many of the difficulties raised by species theory are simply not addressed, not least the transformation of the sensible species into immaterial species, presumably under the action of the agent intellect. Here they are considered by FitzRalph as given within internal mental processes. There is no mention yet of the agent intellect or of the other intellects.

4. Knowledge and Willing

As we have seen, for FitzRalph species in memory and actual cognition are not the same. What, then, of knowledge and willing? Are they the same? After examining various arguments, FitzRalph concludes that they are not. Having reviewed the arguments, he maintains that willing something is not the same as knowing it, even if the act of willing something is the knowledge of the same because it is present to the intellect. His reason is when the will wills it necessarily carries out its action, just like any other agent.

³⁶ Richard FitzRalph, *Lectura in Sententias*, I, q. 6, art. 4 (*PI*, f. 31vb): “Ideo videtur michi esse dicendum in isto articulo, sicut dicit Doctor Sollempnis, 7 Quodlibet, q. 13: quod actualis cogitacio sit distincta realiter a specie in memoria sive in intellectu: quia aliter non videtur michi quod cogitacio actualis esset accio intellectus, quod tamen conceditur ab omnibus. Non enim videtur michi posse intelligi quomodo esset eius accio, nisi intellectus esset eius causa efficiens; et si intellectus est causa efficiens eius, tunc non est species que prefuit, quia ista prius fuit in causa, et ideo nunc non fit ab aliquo nouiter, quando intellectus actu intelligit.”

Thus, the action of the will of the one willing, after he did not will, is something new which arose in it and from it, not something that existed before the act of willing.³⁷

In his concise answer, FitzRalph states that willing with respect to a certain thing is not the cognition of the same even if both occur at the same time when the object is present to both. Indeed, the will acts like any other agent and thus the action of the will after not willing is something new, which arises by and from itself and certainly not as a result of an earlier act.

This section of the *Lectura* has been investigated in some detail by Kitanov.³⁸ FitzRalph's position that volition presupposes cognition and cannot occur naturally without a preceding act of cognition is analyzed by Kitanov both as presented in the reply to the article and in the arguments for and against. FitzRalph's debt to Augustine in the *De Trinitate* is unmistakable given, as one would expect, the preponderance of citations from this work in the text when it comes to discussing how the powers and acts of the human soul reflect the Trinity.³⁹

Kitanov examines FitzRalph's response to arg. 9 where he takes the objection to be that the human will has a memory and intelligence of its own, somewhat independent of the mind itself. Therefore, the questions become, on the one hand, "how far can you push the distinction between the intellect and will and their corresponding activities"; and on the other hand to what extent these activities are integrated in the human mind.⁴⁰ Kitanov interprets the "*cognitio sui ipsius*" in the text as indicating the following argument: "the volition of the thing is perhaps the cognition of itself [the volition] insofar as it [the volition] is present to the intellect. This approach allows Kitanov to clarify FitzRalph's position that volition does not take place

³⁷ Richard FitzRalph, *Lectura in Sententias*, I, q. 6, art. 4, ad art. (*Pl*, f. 34ra): "Propter illa argumenta teneo hanc partem: scilicet, quod volucio respectu alicuius rei non est cognitio eiusdem; quamvis fortassis volucio alicuius rei sit cognitio sui ipsius, propter hoc quod ipsa est presens intellectui: et propter hanc causam, quia voluntas in volendo necessario agit suam accionem, sicut quodlibet aliud agens, et ideo actio voluntatis volentis postquam non voluit est aliquid de novo factum in seipsa et a seipsa, non aliquid prius factum antequam ipsa uelit."

³⁸ Kitanov, 2017, pp. 90–93.

³⁹ Kitanov, 2017, p. 90.

⁴⁰ Kitanov, 2017, p. 91.

in isolation from the rest of the mind, which FitzRalph regards as one. Thus, when the will wants something, the intellect is simultaneously aware of this:

One may perhaps say that the volitional activity of the soul is on some very basic level cognitively transparent, insofar as the volition of any given object also involves the soul's awareness of itself as willing.⁴¹

Thus, Kitanov concludes that for FitzRalph the volition of any object is accompanied by reflexive awareness and that volition is cognition of itself rather than cognition of the object willed.⁴²

5. Memory, Understanding, and Will

Returning to the initial problem posed: are memory, understanding, and will really distinct from each other? FitzRalph's answer seems close to that of Scotus and perhaps also that of Walter Chatton (1290–1343), and that is that they are distinct (the position Chatton defended against Ockham). FitzRalph here argues against the position of Aquinas, namely that understanding and memory are one power but that the understanding and will are two powers. Following Avicenna (980–1037), Aquinas argues that the identity of being and power (*esse est posse*) is found only in God and that, in all other beings, essence is distinct from power.⁴³ FitzRalph points out that in fact Aquinas is contradicting himself because in the case of prime matter he accepts that its substance or essence is its power or potency.⁴⁴ Henry of Ghent's *reductio ad absurdum* argument is also referenced.⁴⁵

⁴¹ Kitanov, 2017, p. 92.

⁴² Kitanov, 2017, pp. 92–93.

⁴³ Richard FitzRalph, *Lectura in Sententias*, I, q. 6, art. 3 (*PI*, f. 27ra): “In isto articulo tenet Thomas, prima parte *Scripti*, dist. 3, art. 3, q. 2, quod intellectus et memoria sunt una potentia, sed intellectus et voluntas duae. Probat hoc per haec quod in solo Deo esse est posse, ut dicit expresse Avicenna, ergo in aliis a Deo essentia non est potentia [...]”

⁴⁴ Richard FitzRalph, *Lectura in Sententias*, I, q. 6, art. 3 (*PI*, f. 27ra): “Contra Thomam [...] Praeterea, potentia materiae primae est sua substantia sicut ipse ibidem dicit, ergo in aliqua creatura essentia est potentia.”

⁴⁵ Richard FitzRalph, *Lectura in Sententias*, I, q. 6, art. 3 (*PI*, f. 27ra): “Praeterea, tunc potentia illius potentiae esset aliud ab ipsa, et sic in infinitum.” (Vide de isto Doctorem Sollemnem, 3 *Quodlibet*, q. 14).

Löwe calls Aquinas's argument the category argument: a power must be in the same category as its operation and observes that why this should be so is unclear, but Aquinas found it compelling as an argument and refers to it a number of times.⁴⁶ In all other creatures besides God, Aquinas argues, an operation is an accident. For example, if we consider our vital operations none of them are essential to us, because most of them come and go. Even vital operations such as our heartbeat are not used to define what a human being is, and so this too must be an accident. Thus, all the powers that give rise to our vital operations must also be accidents and these of course are the powers of the soul.

Henry of Ghent, who FitzRalph quotes in opposition to Aquinas, holds that all substances essentially possess certain powers including the soul, and so there is no reason to hold that the powers are accidents of the soul, calling such a view "very frivolous."⁴⁷ In his answer FitzRalph uses a distinction, made by Scotus⁴⁸—though not attributed to him here in the *Lectura*—between the two meanings of the Latin word "*potentia*" as indicating potential or power—we must presume that it had become a commonplace by FitzRalph's time. Scotus thinks that Aquinas's category argument, namely that

⁴⁶ Löwe, 2025, p. 17.

⁴⁷ See Henry of Ghent, *Quodlibet* III, q. 14 (Paris ed. 1518 f. 67): "[...] patet quod multum frivolum est dicere quod forma substantialis, vel substantia aliqua per suam essentiam non potest esse principium alicuius operationis accidentalis: sed solum per aliquod accidentale sibi inhaerens: vt idcirco quia entire, intelligere, et huiusmodi operations sunt accidentals animae, dicamus quod non procedunt ab anima, nisi per potentiam: quae est accidens in ea, vt anima separata, vel homo informatus anima intelligit non per substantiam ipsius animae sed per aliquid de secunda specie qualitatis, quod est proprietas existens in ea sicut ignis non calefacit nisi qualitate sua: quae est calor." Translation in Friedman & Löwe, 2025, pp. 72–95; here at p. 78: "[...] it is clear that it is very frivolous to say that through its essence a substantial form or a substance cannot be the principle of an accidental operation, but only through something accidental inhering in it, so that since sensing, understanding, and other operations are accidental to the soul, we should say that they only proceed from the soul through a power that is an accident, as if a separated soul or a human being informed by a soul would understand not through the soul's substance itself, but rather through something belonging to the second species of quality, which is a property existing in the soul, just as fire only heats through its quality which is heat."

⁴⁸ John Duns Scotus, *Commentary on the Sentences (Reportatio A)*, II, dist. 16, ed. Wadding, pp. 345–346; see discussion in Löwe, 2025, p. 29; van den Bercken, 2015. [transl. Friedman & Löwe, 2025, pp. 145–166]

a vital power is an accident because its operation is likewise an accident⁴⁹ rests on an equivocation made by Aquinas of the term potency as used by Aristotle in the *Metaphysics*.⁵⁰ Thus, for Scotus, potency can be understood as first, a power which is a causal principle that has actuality in its own right and remains in existence when actualized; for example, my ability to speak English is an actual property of mine and when I do not exercise it, it does not cease to exist; and second, as a potential mode of being, namely, a possible object which does not as yet exist.

Scotus holds that Aquinas's category principle does not hold true of powers but only of potencies. Scotus here follows Henry and argues that not every power can be in the same category as its act, on the pain of an infinite regress (as seen above and quoted by FitzRalph). Not everything can be in potency and the regress must be halted by admitting that a power is an essential feature of a substance, and is thus a power, and its potential activity, need not be in the same category, contrary to what Aquinas maintained.

Applying this then FitzRalph states:

Memory, understanding, and will can be understood in two ways: first, as acts, and second, as the powers from which those acts proceed or in which they reside (...) thus, I maintain that memory, understanding, and will are not really distinct within one mind; here, I understand memorative power to mean intellectual memory rather than sensitive memory, which is not our concern in this article. This is clear in as much as the essence of the human mind is made directly in the image of its maker and therefore directly through its essence it can know its creator, having knowledge in itself as through an active power, even if it requires its own proper action.⁵¹

⁴⁹ See, Löwe, 2025, p. 29.

⁵⁰ See for example, Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, V 12 1019a 14–15; IX i, 1046a 10–13. John Duns Scotus, *Commentary on the Sentences (Reportata Parisiensa)*, II, dist. 16 (ed. Wadding, p. 345): “In reply to the first argument I say that ‘potency’ (potential) is taken in two ways. In one way, ‘potency’ is taken as a principle of being and so understood it is divided into active and passive principles, as is clear from *Metaphysics* V and IX. In another way potency and act are taken as differentiae of being.” [transl. Friedman & Löwe, 2025, p. 149]

⁵¹ Richard FitzRalph, *Lectura in Sententias*, I, q. 6, art. 3 (*PI*, ff. 27rb–va): “Ideo dico ad illum articulum cum queritur: Utrum memoria, etc., quod quaelibet istarum intentionem memoria, intelligentia, et voluntas accipitur dupliciter ad propositum: uno modo pro actu, alio modo pro potentia a qua vel in qua est actus—et sic est ad propositum. Unde sic dico, quod memoria, intelligentia et voluntas, non sunt distincte realiter in una mente—et intelligo

He then criticizes Henry's statement that all the powers of the soul are the very essence of the soul because that would imply that all the powers of the soul, not only intellectual but also sensitive, would derive from the rational soul. He then refers in detail to the condemnation at Oxford by Robert Kilwardby (1215–1279) that the vegetative, sensitive, and intellectual souls are one simple form. FitzRalph comments that it can be argued and shown that man has an extended sensitive soul like other animals especially since the intellectual soul is created and is not produced by man and through procreation. He notes that if an animal can produce an animal soul, so much more should it be possible for a man, the perfect animal, to do so. Nor does it seem that the vegetative and sensitive soul in man and animals is any different but whether one posits one soul or two in man, the sensitive powers derive from the sensitive soul and intellectual powers from the intellectual soul.⁵² However, it should be noted that the activity of any part is ultimately the activity of the whole and is only of the part in an accidental way. The powers of the soul are not really distinct from the soul but are distinguished only insofar as they are exercised through one part rather than another. The three acts of the mind remain distinct as acts: first memory, then understanding, and finally willing.

6. Agent Intellect

The final example of FitzRalph's attempt to reconcile Augustine and Aristotle comes in Book I, question 9 regarding the Agent Intellect. After a lengthy collection of arguments drawn primarily from Aristotle and Averroes,⁵³ the answer inspired by Henry of Ghent is to identify the Agent Intellect

per potentiam memorativam in proposito memoriam [*PI*, f. 27va] intellectivam, non sensitivam, quia de illa non est articulus. Istud patet per hoc quod essentia mentis humanae facta est immediate ad imaginem sui conditoris, et immediate nulla interposita alia creatura ipsa illi adhaeret, sicut dicit Augustinus, libro 83 *Questionum*, q. 52. Et ideo ipsa per suam essentiam immediate potest suum creatorem cognoscere habita cognitione in se tamquam per potentiam activam, etsi requirat actionem suam propriam." [transl. M.W.D.]

⁵² See, Richard FitzRalph, *Lectura in Sententias*, I, q. 6, art. 3 (*PI*, f. 27rb).

⁵³ FitzRalph's constant use of Philosopher together with the Commentator, or an Aristotle read through the lens of Averroes, led some scholars to opine that FitzRalph was an Averroist but, in fact, his is the standard practice of the time.

with God and, as such, it is not a part of the image. In FitzRalph's opinion (*videtur mihi*), the Agent Intellect is not part of the image of the rational mind because it is the First Form, namely God. While united to the human mind, God prepares it to receive the impressions arising from the intentions in the material powers. God, as Agent Intellect,⁵⁴ illuminates the human mind so that it can look within itself and into the divine nature to which reason is connected as its natural origin and to anything truly knowable. Thus, the Agent Intellect acts on the material intellect by preparing and establishing it. This is because the impressions of the material powers are themselves material and, as such, they are not constituted either to produce something abstract or to act upon something abstract through their own power, even by means of a disposition or preparation effected in them by another finite power. Since no abstract form can immediately transmute matter or a material thing, such a transition requires an infinite power. Hence, FitzRalph concludes that natural changes, whether in the imagination, the particular sense, the common sense, or another power, can produce an indivisible and abstract species in the material intellect only because that intellect has first been illuminated and prepared by an infinite power. No finite power could accomplish this on its own.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Osbert Pickenham, O.Carm., commenting on the *Sentences* a decade later (early 1240s), also holds that God is the Agent Intellect. An examination of how this idea circulated at Oxford in the 1330s after FitzRalph's *Lectura* is very much needed. See Xiberta, 1931, p. 255.

⁵⁵ Richard FitzRalph, *Lectura in Sententias*, I, q. 9 (*PI*, f. 52ra–b): “Propter argumenta predicta, uidetur michi [f. 52rb] esse dicendum quod intellectus agens non est pars ymaginis mentis rationalis quia est forma prima scilicet Deus tempore quatenus sicut coniungitur menti hominis ut preparat ipsam ad recipiendum passionem ab intencionibus in uirtutibus materialibus hominis. Et in quatenus illuminat mentem hominis ut possit respicere intra se et in natura diuina cui naturali origine coniungitur rationem cuicunque rei uere scibilis et sic duo facit in intellectu materiali scilicet dupliciter eum preparat idem et ponitur propter intenciones materialium uirtutum que sunt materiales et ideo non sunt nate agere aliquod abstractum neque in aliquod abstractum uirtute propria nec eciam per disposicionem uel per preparacionem factam in eis ab alia uirtute finita cum nulla forma abstracta possit immediate transmutare materiam uel rem materialem sicut dicitur 2^o *Metaphisice*, commento 47, et 7 *Metaphisice*, commento 28 et 31 et multo minus econtrario. Vnde necessario oportet mutaciones naturales siue sunt in ymaginatiua siue sunt in sensu particulari uel communi sensu uel in alia uirtute ad hoc quod causant speciem indiuisibilem et abstractam in intellectu materiali illuminati et preparati per aliam uirtutem infinitam cum nulla uirtus finita ad hec sufficiat ut uidetur.”

7. Conclusion

Clear problems had already emerged by the mid-thirteenth century for theologians trying to preserve Augustine's triadic conception of mind in the face of the new Aristotelian/Averroistic understanding. Encouraged by the notion that *veritas consonat veritati*, there seems to have been a conviction that this reconciliation could indeed be effected. However, as will happen later with the various crises of medieval Aristotelian physics, for example regarding projectile motion, thinkers writing on the powers of the soul resorted to ad hoc devices, or "patches," to cover what was, in effect, a crisis: for if on the surface the puzzle looked solvable, the use of increasingly analytic methods seemed, unexpectedly, to make the problem worse. FitzRalph, as a bachelor of theology, "reading" the *Sentences*, is debating and offering his views on a range of topics together with his fellow socii at Oxford in the years 1328–1329, topics that had been drawn into the orbit of the "powers of the soul" debate, including species theory. His proposed solution was to return to a detailed analysis of Augustine and rereading Aquinas, Henry of Ghent and Duns Scotus. He did not have the last word, of course, and probably did not expect to have it.⁵⁶

FitzRalph's text demonstrates the resilience of Augustine's thought in dialogue with Aristotle and that it was a tradition capable of renewal to respond to contemporary questions and debates. While the theological context is recognizable, the quality and methodology of these debates are more metaphysical than theological. If, up to the twelfth century, what is being considered is the theory of the human soul in particular, and its status as an image of the divine, by the fourteenth century the considerations are much broader than the human soul and its powers and due to the acceptance of hylomorphism, the focus is on souls and substantial forms and their powers in general. FitzRalph sought to make his own contribution to the debates, and his work turned out to be an influential presence in the decades which followed.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ As an example of how the debates evolved there is William Crathorn (fl. 1330s), who read the *Sentences* several years later and who treats FitzRalph's arguments with great respect but rejects nearly every one of his positions.

⁵⁷ Kitanov, 2017, p. 93, sums this up extremely well: "We can conclude that FitzRalph remained true to the spirit of St. Augustine by emphasizing the singularity and integrity

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of the human mind while at the same time preserving the mind's multi-dimensionality. We can also say that this very effort to balance Augustine's attention to the mind's cohesive unity against Augustine's concern with shielding the distinctiveness of each facet of the Trinitarian image in the human mind is what sets FitzRalph to some degree apart from his contemporaries and why he deserves to be studied."

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